THE DUTY OF REPROOF,

With the most *Material* OBJECTIONS

Against it Considered:

AND SOME

CAUTIONS & Directions added, which may be helpful towards a successful Discharge of it.

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THE DUTY OF REPROOF.

SOCIETY, they tell us, gave Man his Denomination; and indeed whoſoever thinks that he was born only for himſelf, forgets that he was born a Man, and has little more left him, than his bare humane Figure, to diſtinguiſh him from a wild and ſolitary Beaſt.

Am I my Brother's Keeper, was therefore both a ſurly and inhumane Reply, fit only for the Mouth of him, who was doom'd to be a Fugative and a Vagabond in the Earth. But leaſt ſuch a miſchievous and ſelfiſh Principle ſhould univerſally prevail, the wiſe and merciful Providence of *God* has ſo order'd it, that our continual Dependance

upon each other ſhould be the Bond of mutual Commerce and Affection; ſo that no Man having the Means of Happineſs entirely in himſelf, every one is forc'd to borrow from other Hands wherewith to ſweeten Life, and make his Condition comfortable.

Hence a ſerious Concern for the Benefit of our Neighbour, is deeply intermixt with our own, and has ſo inſinuated it ſelf into our very Nature, that a due Obſervance of this Virtue, has appropriated to its ſelf the Name of *Humanity*. Thus to relieve the Indigent, to viſit the Sick, to vindicate the Injur'd, and comfort the Diſconſolate, are Actions which the worſt of Mankind will acknowledge Praiſeworthy, and to which every Man, who has not wholly debauch'd and ſtupifi'd his Reaſon, finds in himſelf a ſtrong Propenſity. Only where the *Soul* of our Brother is the Object, and *ſpiritual Counſel* the Alms to be imparted, there uſually we are very backward, and hardly to be perſuaded that it is indeed our Duty. Hence we may find many who hold themſelves oblig'd to part with Bread for the Preſervation of their Neighbours Body, who yet

yet would be excus'd the Charity of ſetting the Soul one Step forward in its way to Heaven: Eſpecially where *Friendly Reproof* is requiſite, and our Neighbours Faults are ripped up in order to amend him: Here even good and pious Perſons diſcover a ſtrange Averſion, tremble at the Office, as too ſevere and difficult, and are for ſhuffling aſide the unwelcome Obligation upon any Terms. But how ready ſoever Men may be to excuſe themſelves and others in this Point; Men that are *unwilling* to *Reprove*, and *more unwilling* to be *Reproved*; yet with *God* it is indiſpenſible, who has bound it upon us all, in as ſtrict a Charge as any other Precept whatſoever.

My Deſign being, if poſſible, to retrieve the Credit, and recover the Practice of this ſhamefully neglected Duty, the diſuſe whereof has given ſo much Encouragement to all Prophaneneſs and Debauchery, and caus'd ſo ſenſible a Decay of Piety and Virtue; I ſhall in the plaineſt Manner, and with all the ſeriouſneſs I can,

I. Examine the Pretences whereupon Men generally excuſe themſelves from it.

II. Urge ſome Arguments to perſuade them to it. And,

III. Propoſe ſuch Cautions and Directions as may be helpful towards the ſucceſsful Diſcharge of it.

I begin with the Pretences that are uſually alledg'd to excuſe Men from the Practice of it. Man was no ſooner fallen, than he began to be a querulous Creature, more apt to Complain than Obey; and would *God* diſpence with his Commands, as often as Man could frame Excuſes, there would be no ſuch thing as *Duty* in the World: For as that Wiſdom which created, ſo that Goodneſs which redeemed the World, has been arraign'd and cenſur'd at the Bar of humane Judgment: Not a Ceremony in the Law, not a Command in the Decalogue, not a Doctrine in the Goſpel, but has been traverſed by open Oppoſition, or admitted with Murmuring and great Reluctance. As particularly in the Caſe before us; tho' the Salvation of a Soul muſt be thought worthy every Man's Care and Endeavour, who ſincerely believes its Immortality; yet when Reproof is the Part expected from us towards

towards it, how ready are we to excuſe our ſelves, by pretending,

1. That this is an *unpleaſant* Office, enough to fright Men from Society, if they muſt undergo the continual Mortification of having their Faults and Follies cenſur'd; to harp upon this harſh String, muſt needs be grating to the Ear, and ſpoil the Harmony of Converſation; 'tis galling my Friend in his tendereſt Part; 'tis to ſet up for a Dictator, and make my Tongue a Scourge to the Company. The End will be, every Man will be ſhy of my Viſits, weary of my Diſcourſe, and in return, inquiſitive to find out, and forward to publiſh *my* Faults and Miſcarriages to the World; and the only Thanks I am like to get is, to go away with the Character of a buſie and impertinent Coxcomb. 'Twas this made *Elijah* paſs for a Troubler of *Iſrael*, and *Micajah* a hateful Perſon to King *Ahab*; and St. *Paul* was reputed a mad Man for the Liberty he took before *Feſtus*.

I anſwer, That tho' all God's Ways are Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and there are Motives enough in Piety to convince the Reaſon and engage the Af-

fections of any ſerious and well-diſpos'd Perſon; yet it is all Myſtery and Paradox to him that never made the Experiment; and therefore he that will perform no Duty, till corrupt Nature ſhall pronounce it pleaſant and agreeable, is never likely to do any thing at all in the ways of God and Religion.

But if thou art a *Chriſtian*, for ſhame prefer not thy *Eaſe* before thy *Duty*, nor value thy Brother's *Reſpect* above his *Soul*: Look not to the *Conſequence*, but to the *Performance* of the Command, and grudge not to ſerve *God* of that which coſt thee ſomething. Suppoſe the worſt, that you ſhould be frown'd upon and ſlighted, ſhun'd and hated, and your Reputation ſuffer thro' the Reſentment of barbarous and unthankful Spirits, for reproving faithfully as you ought; remember, that a good Man will proſecute his Duty *thro' evil Report and good Report*. 2 Cor. VI. 8. It is creditable to loſe our good Name in *God*'s Cauſe; 'tis happy for that Man, againſt whom the World has nothing to alledge, but the being too nicely ſolicitous of his Brother's Salvation. The Peace of

a Conſcience void of Offence, and the acquittance and ſatisfaction of thy own Mind, will make thee abundant Recompence in this World, and *God*, who judges not as Man does, will yet more amply Reward thee in the next: For *he that converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Way, ſhall ſave a Soul from Death, and ſhall hide a multitude of Sins.* Jam. V. ult. Nor, laſtly, be much concern'd at the Grief and Diſturbance thy Reproof will create in thy Friend, provided it be effectual; for Sorrow is the neceſſary Conſequence of Sin; and better ſure it is, that by a timely Repentance it ſhould end in Joy, than hereafter in Weeping and Wailing and gnaſhing of Teeth. *Prov.* XXVIII. 23. *Matt.* XXII. 13.

2. It is objected, That this is a dangerous Office, may ſooner enrage the Party than amend him, and draw upon one's ſelf the Fury as well as Hatred of an obſtinate Sinner, who will be ſure to think himſelf affronted by Reproof, and inſtead of thanking us for the Charity of it, turn again and rent us. The Baptiſt loſt his Head for Reproving *Herod*, and it was uſu-

al the rebellious Houſe of *Iſrael* for to Stone the Prophets that were ſent to them upon this Errand. There are Inſtances (*God* knows too many) of ſuch as would fain be unaccountable in their Wickedneſs, and becauſe they hate to be reformed, affect to be above the reach of Notice and Rebuke. As for ſuch bold Sinners, whoſe Conſciences are ſear'd to all Advice and Argument; it is not, I think, either ſafe or prudent to apply to them this way, without an immediate Commiſſion from Heaven: this is waſting the precious Ointment, and ſpilling Water on the Ground, without any hopes of Bleſſing or Succeſs. And for our Juſtification we have the wiſe Man's Counſel, *Reprove not a Scorner, leſt he hate thee*, Prov. IX. 8. Such a one may and ought to be recommended in our Prayers, (becauſe with God all things are poſſible) and brought to the due Correction of the Laws, where the Offence is ſuch as is cognizable by the civil Magiſtrate: But Reproof is certainly thrown away upon him, and if he be irreclaimable alſo by the Laws, leave him as the Phyſician does his deſperate Patient upon whom all Remedies

dies prove ſucceſsleſs: Only remember that he be a *Scorner* with whom you deal thus. It is not ſufficient that he has *walked in the Counſel of the Ungodly*, nor that he has *ſtood in the way of Sinners*; theſe are *proper Objects* for a ſeaſonable Reproof; but if he has *ſat down in the Seat of the Scornful*, he is loſt to all good Advice, not within the Power of gentle and ordinary Means, and 'tis to be fear'd, that nothing will awaken him, but either the juſt Severity of the Magiſtrate in this World, or everlaſting Burnings in the next. As to that Part of the Objection which reſpects our ſelves, we ought to be very cautious of making falſe Alarms of Danger and Difficulty, only to excuſe us the Trouble of diſcharging our Duty. *A Lion in the way* was the *Sluggard*'s Pretence from Buſineſs; and where the unworthy Fear of Man prevails, we are never at a Loſs to raiſe ſome imaginary Phantom to fright us from proceeding. But when *God* bids us go, it is not Danger that ſhould keep us back; ſhall *we* be afraid of doing *Good*, when others are not afraid of doing *Evil?* Let us learn Courage even from the Sinner himſelf: For if

he fears not *God*, what Reaſon have we to ſtand in Fear of *him*? Go therefore with as much Courage to rebuke, as thy Brother did to offend; and be as fearleſs in thy Reproof, as he was in his Sin, *Ezek.* II. 6.

But if the Pretence of Dangers will not ſatisfie, it will be pretended,

3. That it is a *needleſs* Office. It is true (ſay the Objectors) tho' there is Danger enough in the Attempt, yet every Man that does his Duty may hope for Protection from God; but why ſhould we interpoſe, when the Offender wants not Reaſon within himſelf to inſtruct him, or the ſecret Stings of Conſcience to reprove him? If therefore he do amiſs, to his own Maſter he muſt ſtand and fall, and need not be accountable to me for his Offence; I find Sins enough of my own to examine, and Buſineſs enough of my own to attend, without troubling my ſelf with a curious Inſpection into other Peoples.

This is juſt *Cain*'s Language, *Am I my Brother's Keeper*? 'Tis the beſt Plea that many a Man has to offer in Excuſe for not reproving his ſinful Friend. What! Is he not as underſtanding

ſtanding a Man as my ſelf? Do ye think he is not ſenſible of what he does? But would to God the Ground of this Pretence were true, that it were really a needleſs Office to admoniſh and reprove our Neighbour. But alas! the daily Enormities of the Prophane and Vicious, and the frequent Miſcarriages even of the good and well-diſpoſed, demonſtrate the Neceſſity of it beyond all Contradiction. And is it not therefore an Argument of a moſt careleſs and unchriſtian Spirit, when we can ſee our Friend poſting on to Hell, without ſtopping him ſhort, to advertiſe him of his Danger, or offering him one ſerious Counſel, one ſeaſonable Reproof in order to his Recovery? Not to tell a Man of his Faults, becauſe he has Reaſon and Conſcience to tell himſelf of them, is juſt as if one ſhould refuſe to help up a Man that was fallen, becauſe he had Legs to keep him from the Ground: And he that forbears his Reproof upon no better Account, but only becauſe it would be a Reflection upon the Perſon's Diſcretion and Conduct, is as unreaſonable and uncharitable as he that will not tell a blind Man he is out of his

way,

way, for fear of being thought to take Notice of the Loſs of his Sight.

But the great Diſcouragement of all is, 4. That it is an *unſucceſsful* and *hopeleſs* Office. The Diſappointments of others that have gone before us in this Duty, tend very much to obviate and abate whatever can be ſaid to encourage us to follow them. *Noah* by all his convincing Diſcourſes and wholeſome Reproofs, could not perſuade Eight Perſons to provide againſt the approaching Deluge. What Return had juſt *Lot* for his Rebukes of wicked *Sodom*, but their Contempt and Mockery to vex his righteous Soul? *Moſes* could upbraid and threaten, but could not incline or ſoften *Pharaoh*; Miracles of Reproof and Conviction Ten Times ſucceſſively repeated, ſhook his hard Heart, but could not break it; amus'd and frighted him, but could not draw him to Obedience: Nay, Wiſdom herſelf complaineth of ſome, that *ſet at nought her Counſel, and would none of her Reproof*, Prov. I. 25. Who then is ſufficient for theſe things? It muſt be own'd, that it is a great Diſcouragement, and enough to break the Reſolution of many an Attempt, when we find

find all our Entreaties and all our Labours vain, and our beſt intended Kindneſſes ill-accepted: The holy Spirit it ſelf (we read) is griev'd, when its ſanctifying Motions are quench'd, and its heavenly Offers rejected: But however, it is *our* Part carefully to uſe the *Means* which *God* has appointed, and leave to him the *Iſſue* and *Succeſs*. Tho' *Paul* planted, and *Apollos* watered, the Encreaſe was ſtill from *God*. The Comfort of our Duty does not ſo much ariſe from the Succeſs which follows it, as from the faithful Diſcharge and Performance of it. It is true, to ſee a ſecure Soul awaken'd by our Advice, and reform'd by our Reproof; to ſee every Meſſage crown'd with a Bleſſing, and all our pious Deſigns effectual, muſt be allow'd an Occaſion of Joy, and an inviting Argument to proceed: But our chief Comfort and higheſt Encouragement is not dependant upon a Matter ſo uncertain; for *whether* Men *will hear, or whether they will forbear*, whether they embrace or deſpiſe our Reproof, whether our Counſel leaves them relenting or deriding, it is enough to ſupport us, that we have performed our Duty, and thereby *delivered our Soul*.

What

What then if our Seed fall upon ſtony Ground, will our Harveſt be entirely loſt? Are we not entituled to a Reward in Heaven for the Sincerity of our Endeavours? What if they be retorted upon us in malicious Slanders, and our Deſire to reform an Offender, paſs only for a Mask to conceal our own Hypocriſie? What if they make no Impreſſion, and the Sinner turn a deaf Ear to the moſt perſuaſive Repreſentations? Yet ſince *God* allows him the Opportunity of Means, why ſhall not we make the Tender of them? Why ſhall we give him up for loſt before his Time, by withdrawing our good Advice and Counſel, when Heaven has not pronounced him irreclaimable? But *God* be praiſed, as bad as the World is, it is not yet ſunk ſo low as this Objection ſuppoſes it; Modeſty, tho' in a declining State, has yet ſome Influence upon Mankind; there being few Sinners of that perfect Accompliſhment in Vice, as to ſhew no Remorſe whilſt under the Diſcipline of a prudent Reprover: If then by our Admonitions we can but prevent his next Appointment of Debauchery, if we can but gain a Bluſh, a Confeſſion, a

Pro-

Promiſe of Amendment, we ſhould never deſpair of good Succeſs, but expect the gentle Influences of Heaven to concur with our pious Endeavours to reclaim him.

Let therefore no Pretence be made to excuſe us, no Objection diſcourage us from the faithful Diſcharge of ſo friendly a Duty: Think not that an unpleaſant Task which may end in your Brother's Salvation: Let no Danger affright you from reſcuing his Soul from the Danger of Hell; call not that needleſs which *God* calls neceſſary; nor ever deſpair of Succeſs, before you have made and frequently repeated the Attempt: But what Excuſe ſoever Fleſh and Blood may ſuggeſt, remember it is *God's Cauſe* you are engag'd in, who has ſtrictly commanded thee *in any wiſe* (or whatever comes of it) *to rebuke thy Neighbour, and not ſuffer Sin upon him*, Levit. XIX. 17.

II. I ſhall now offer ſome Arguments to preſs Men to this Duty; and I find none attended with ſtronger; for,

1. It is a direct Obedience to God's plain Command. The higheſt Authority

rity that any Precept is capable of, is the Sanction it receives from Heaven; it is this that gives it the Force of a Command, and who is it that dares to confront a *Thus ſaith the Lord*? Who is he that will diſpute the Authority of the Almighty? Shall Duſt and Aſhes contend with him, or mortal Man be wiſer than his Maker? Is it not enough that God has ſpoken? Were there no other Reaſon for this Duty, than the Command of *God*, it were ſurely ſufficient to perſuade a Chriſtian; and this we have very frequently preſſing us to a ſerious Regard and Performance thereof: *Thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy Neighbour*, ſays *Moſes*, under the Law, *Levit.* XIX. 17. *And if thy Brother treſpaſs againſt thee, rebuke him*, ſays our Saviour in the Goſpel, *Luke* XVII. 3. and the ſame you may find urged in many other Places of both Teſtaments. The chief Meſſage of the Prophets was, to tell *Judah* of their Sins, and *Iſrael* of their Tranſgreſſions: And that the Apoſtles were ſent upon the ſame Errand, we may learn from hence, that the Scriptures (amongſt which their Writings, the Tranſcript of what they preach'd, are included) are

are expreſly ſaid to be *profitable for Reproof*, 2 Tim. III. 16. And the Preachers and Diſpenſers of the Word are commanded to *rebuke*, to *exhort*, Chap. IV. 2. Let not Men therefore expect to hear Peace, Peace, from us, while they are in open War and Diſagreement with Heaven: Let them expect from us no ſuch Complaiſance as to connive at their provoking Sins, and to ſooth and flatter them into Miſery and Deſtruction. If we, Inſtructors and Paſtors of the Church, *warn not the Wicked to turn from his way, the Wicked indeed ſhall die in his Iniquity, but his Blood will God require at our Hands*, Ezek. XXXIII. 8. God forbid therefore, that we, the Miniſters of Chriſt, ſhould ſin in ceaſing to reprove you; and if ever Reproof was becoming and ſeaſonable in the Pulpit, if ever it was needful to entertain our Hearers with this Subject; certainly the encreaſing Prophaneneſs of bold and inſolent Sinners, the infectious Corruption of evil Communication, the decaying and almoſt expiring Cauſe of Piety and Religion in our Days, will recommend it in a more eſpecial Manner to our Conſideration and Practice. But God knows how ſhort and inſufficient

ent our Endeavours of this kind (if we alone are to be concern'd in it) muſt be to reclaim and amend the World: We are not (and a Comfort to us it is that we are not) Eye-Witneſſes of all the daring Provocations and monſtrous Enormities daily committed about us; wherefore we can only give general Preſcriptions, except here and there a particular Application, as an Offender happens in our way, or is perſonally known to us; the divine Goodneſs therefore has not only made it a Part of the Paſtoral Office, but the Duty of every *private Chriſtian*, to reprove his offending Brother.

2. A careful Practice of this Duty would be a conſiderable Check to the Growth of Sin in the World. While the Sinner poſts on freely in a full Career, without the leaſt Curb or Reſtraint, he grows ſecure, and Security makes him ſhameleſs; hereby the Seeds of Wickedneſs take deep Root, Prophaneneſs throws off all Fear and Diſguiſe, and Vice triumphs without Oppoſition: Thus our cowardly Silence paſſes for Licence and Approbation, our Neutrality gives Countenance to Exceſs and Debauchery, and by

by our faint-hearted Connivance, we multiply that which in its own Nature is exceeding fruitful. It was a black Stain upon old *Eli*'s Character, not to be *purged with Sacrifice and Offering for ever*, that his *Sons made themſelves vile, and he reſtrained them not*, 1 Sam. III. 13. Magiſtrates are to reprove by a faithful Execution of the Laws, and if they let their Authority ſlumber, which ought to be active in diſcouraging and puniſhing Vice, they do in effect eſtabliſh and promote it; and by the ſame Rule, that Chriſtian, whoever he be, that wilfully lets ſlip a fair Opportunity of reproving Sin, and bringing the Offender to Repentance and Amendment, does (as much as in him lies) make him a Licentiate in Wickedneſs, and give him Liberty and Encouragement both to practiſe and to propagate his Sin. For Permiſſion alone is enough to ſet Sinners on Work; Prophaneneſs needs no Law to ſupport it; a bare Toleration will do the Buſineſs. Since therefore Sin is of ſo eaſie and ſo quick a Growth, does it not require the greater Watchfulneſs and Induſtry to keep it down? Can he be ſaid to hate the Weed, who lets it grow without Diſturbance?

ſturbance? Can he be ſuppoſed an Enemy to Sin, who does not ſet himſelf to oppoſe it? Or rather, Is he not really acceſſory to his Brother's Ruin, that will not uſe his beſt Endeavours to reſcue and preſerve him? It will not avail to acquit him at the great Tribunal, to ſay, that he did not *force*, did not *tempt*, or ſo much as *deſire* him to ſin; it is enough to condemn him that he did not, by *ſeaſonable Advice* and *wholeſome Reproof*, prevent his Neighbour's Fall; but ſtood by unconcern'd, and *ſuffer'd Sin upon him.* But oh! that we could prevail with Men to try this charitable Expedient! What a happy Effect in ſuppreſſing Wickedneſs, and recovering at leaſt the outward Form of Virtue might it have! It may do Good upon the Offender himſelf, when he ſhall be given to underſtand how much he acts againſt the beſt Senſe of the wiſeſt Men, againſt the Juſtice of the Laws that protect him, againſt his own Intereſt of Soul and Body; he cannot ſurely, upon ſuch a Repreſentation, forbear ſome thoughtful Concern for his Duty and his Safety: But the Advantage is not wholly confin'd to the Perſon directly concern'd; for

as publick Penalties are more for Example, and Prevention to others, than for Pain and Puniſhment to the Criminal; ſo by a prudent Reprehenſion, we ſtrike rather at the *Diſeaſe* than the *Patient*, and take the beſt Courſe, not only to make thoſe that are *guilty*, penitent; but thoſe that *would be ſo*, cautious. And therefore, tho' the immediate Object of our Care continue obſtinate and unreform'd, yet may we awaken others into ſome Diſcretion. 'Tis good ſometimes to *ſmite the Scorner*, that if it amend not him, at leaſt *the Simple may beware*, Prov. IX. 25. *Them that ſin* (ſays the Apoſtle) *rebuke before all, that they alſo may fear*, 1 Tim. V. 20. If then we have any Concern upon us, as it becomes all Chriſtians to have, for the Honour of our holy Religion, and to dethrone the inſolent Tyranny of faſhionable and prevailing Wickedneſs; if we would deſtroy the growing Kingdom of Satan, and reſtore Virtue and Goodneſs to their Due and Authority with Mankind; it is time to lay aſide that pernicious Flattery which confirms and encourages Men in their Sins; it is time to exert our ſelves in a ſincere and

honeſt plain dealing; no longer to deceive the Friend whom we profeſs to value, by diſſembling and conniving at his Faults (and much leſs colouring them with falſe Gloſſes and the Names of Virtue). But rebuke and diſcountenance Sin wherever we ſee it, diſdaining that abſurd good Manners of being ſilent where Heaven has made it our Duty to reprove.

3. It is an Argument of our Love to *God*, as it is apparently an Act of Zeal for his Authority and Honour. He that by a tame Compliance ſuffers Sin to get Head, that can ſit ſtill without making any Oppoſition, while the Adverſary goes on conquering, ought no longer to pretend he is on the Side of *God* and Religion; no, he has renounced his Allegiance to his Maker, and denied his Saviour before Men. For ſo has Chriſt declared, *He that is not with me is againſt me*; and indeed how can that Man have the Face to ſay he loves what *God* loves, that has not the Courage to hate what he hates? Or what Senſe of Piety and Religion can he pretend, who has no Concern to ſuppreſs what would deſtroy them? If when my Friend is ſlandered and tra-

traduc'd my Paſſion riſes, and a due Regard to Friendſhip forces me into his Vindication; does not Reaſon, Gratitude, Love, and common Honour, tell me what I am to do, when I hear the holy Name of God blaſphemed, his Worſhip derided, his Providence deny'd, and his very Being called in Queſtion? Shall I ſit mute and Tongue-tied among ſuch clamorous Sinners, and have nothing to ſay for my Maker when they are ſo loud againſt him? When the Workers of Iniquity boaſt of their Wickedneſs, when Luſt, and Blaſphemy, and Prophaneneſs, which proceed from an evil Heart, run over at the Mouth, and Sinners grow as careful to *propagate* as they are to *practiſe* their Impieties; then certainly, if ever, the *Righteous* ought to *ſpeak Wiſdom*, and his *Tongue* to *be talking of Judgment*, Pſal. XXXVII. 30. to vindicate his *God* and his *Religion*, and reprove the rude Offender that inſults them. Not to do *this*, is to diſgrace our Profeſſion, and to be *aſham'd of our Saviour and of his Words*, Luke IX. 26. And if ſo, what is it to laugh at, encourage, and repeat the prophane or filthy Jeſts of the Company? This ſurely is to

be not only a ſecret Enemy to God, but a declared and open Agent for the Devil.

4. It is an Inſtance of the moſt tender Regard we can ſhew to the Soul of our Neighbour. When a dangerous and malignant Diſtemper has ſeiz'd the Body, the Phyſician is not ſo much concern'd that his Compoſitions be palatable, as that they be proper; if Health and Eaſe may be conveyed, he cares not, tho' it be thro' bitter and unſavoury Potions, and would gladly hear his Patient rage and roar, ſo it were in order to his Amendment and Recovery. The Poyſon of the Soul is Sin, that which alienates it from God, and conſigns it to Miſery and Deſtruction: If ever therefore we wou'd rightly place our Pity, an infected Soul is a proper Object; if ever we would exerciſe our kindeſt Charity, it muſt be in *converting a Sinner from the Error of his Ways, and ſaving his Soul from Death.* This is doubtleſs the higheſt Inſtance of humane Love that can be ſhown, and comes neareſt to that ſtupendous Love of God which ſent his Son into the World *to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt.* And this is properly

perly the Buſineſs of Advice and Reproof, which (in *Levit.* XIX. and 17.) is in a remarkable Manner made the neceſſary Conſequence of our Love to our Neighbour. *Thou ſhalt not* (ſays God there) *hate thy Brother in thy Heart*; then it follows, *Thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy Neighbour.* As if whoſoever neglected this Duty could have no true Affection for his Brother, but was ſo far a *Hater* of him, as he was a *Conniver* at his Sin. And with great Reaſon, for Love is a watchful Paſſion, and will be ſure to inform the Perſon beloved of any approaching Danger, and remove it too, if poſſible: Would not Love diſarm a deſperate Friend of that Weapon wherewith he would certainly diſpatch himſelf? Or could it unconcernedly ſee him embracing a Serpent, and not tell him, he hugg'd his own Death? Certainly to croſs and oppoſe our Brother, while he raſhly deſigns his own Ruin, is the ſureſt Proof of Friendſhip; Correction and Rebuke the trueſt Tokens of our Love. Hereby we ſhow that we value our Brother's Soul as well as his Body; and are willing to hazard the Loſs of his Reſpect, rather than baſely ſuffer him

to be an Enemy to himſelf. *Open Rebuke* (ſays *Solomon*) *is better than ſecret Love*, Prov. XXVII. 5. *This* is too apt to ſooth and flatter, to be ſtrait and ſelfiſh, to ſpy no Faults, or to correct none: But a generous and Chriſtian Friendſhip is plain, free, and honeſt; not to be bribed to Secrecy and Silence, where the Caſe requires Openneſs and Information, and never ſpares, no, not a choſen boſom Luſt, for Fear it proves injurious and deadly to our Neighbour. Such *faithful* and *friendly Wounds* (as the wiſe Man calls them, *Prov.* XXVII. 6.) ſuch free and open-hearted Reproofs argue a well-meaning and diſintereſted Spirit, one that aims in earneſt at his Brother's Good, and acts upon no other View than the Glory of *God*, and the Salvation of an endangered Soul. And this was the Practice of the firſt and beſt Days of Chriſtianity, when ſincere Love had better footing in the World, and the Salvation of Souls was a more general Concern: If private Reproof could not reclaim the Offender, publick Cenſure took Place; if he refus'd to *hear his Brother*, it was told *to the Church*, and ſo he was *delivered* unto *Satan for the De-*

Deſtruction of the Fleſh, that the Spirit might be ſaved in the Day of the Lord Jeſus, 1 Cor. V. 5. The notorious Sinner was deny'd the Benefit of Chriſtian Communion, and avoided as an infectious Perſon, that by this Severity he might be frighted out of his Sin, and driven to Repentance. But if Reproof be the natural Effect of brotherly Love, ah! What an expiring Condition is the Love of Chriſtians now in! For where ſhall we go to find the Remnants of that out-dated and unfaſhionable Practice; or where is the Man that makes a careful and conſcientious Obſervance of it? How juſtly may we bewail the Decay of it, and reckon this among the Symptoms of the approaching general Diſſolution! *Then*, ſays our bleſſed Lord, *the Love of many ſhall wax cold*; cold indeed, when the Danger of our Brother's Damnation cannot warm it! But oh! with what Shame and Sorrow will the Neglecters of this Duty be upbraided hereafter by the loſt and miſerable Souls of their Acquaintance! How will they be overwhelm'd with Confuſion at ſuch Complaints as theſe! I was ignorant, and ye inſtructed me not; I was deluded,

and ye advis'd me not; I was ſinful and prophane, and ye reprov'd me not: Had ye been as forward to give as I was capable of receiving Inſtruction and good Counſel: Had ye taken as much Pains to reſcue me, as my Companions did to puſh me on to Ruine; and rebuk'd me as much as they encourag'd me, I might have eſcaped this Place of Torment. But alas! the time of arguing is over, the Wretch is damn'd already, and diſpatch'd to the bottomleſs Pit; muſt he not, think ye, curſe for ever thoſe falſe Friends, thoſe cruel Relations or Governours, that had it in their Power to reprove and admoniſh, and yet *ſuffered Sin upon him*? How much then does it concern thoſe that have the Truſt and Charge of Souls committed to them, whether Maſters of Servants, or Parents of Children, or Guardians of Orphans, that they think not their Obligation diſcharg'd when they have made Proviſion for their *Bodies*, but that they likewiſe take Care of their *Souls*, to inſtruct them in their Duty, and to correct and reprove them when they decline from it; as they would avoid the ſad Reflection of having betray'd thoſe poor

poor Creatures by their Negligence to everlasting Flames.

But because there are few or no Duties, but may be abus'd by Mismanagement, and prove fruitless by misplacing or over-looking some Circumstances to be observ'd; I shall,

III. In the last Place, lay down some Cautions and Directions, which may be useful in the Discharge of this important and laudable Duty. And,

1. I would advise that our Reproof be *seasonable*. *To every thing*, says the wise Man, *there is a Season*; but for none is a Season more to be *watched* and *observ'd*, than for this nice Business of Reproof. For tho' we are always bound to reprove a Sinner, yet a Sinner is not to be reprov'd always; not because our Obligation ceases, but because his Incapacity forbids. 'Tis sometimes advisable to silence the Sinner, and sometimes to keep Silence before him; at one time it may be needful to reprimand the Offender, and at another to *hold our Tongues as with a Bridle, and refrain even from good Words while the Ungodly is in our Sight*. Thus for Instance, I would not reprove a

Drunkard in his Cups, nor an enrag'd Perſon in the Height of his Paſſion, nor always a Fool in his Folly: This were to *caſt my Peal before Swine*. To recommend Sobriety to a Sot, while his Brain is overclouded with Fumes, and his Senſes drown'd in Liquor, is all one as to extol Light and the Sun before a blind Man; let him ſee firſt, and then you may convince him. To rebuke and reaſon with a Man in the Height of his Fury, is to as much Purpoſe as to argue the tempeſtuous Winds into good Humour, and the Waves to Silence; let him cool a little, and perhaps you may prevail. In all Applications therefore of this Nature we are to ſtudy the *mollia tempora fandi*, the favourable Inſtants of Addreſs, when they are likely to be beſt received. And thus ſome obſerve *God* dealt with our firſt Parents, not proceeding to the Curſe and Puniſhment immediately after their Fall, when it is like their Paſſions were all tumultuous, and their Grief and Shame had made them deſperate; but he ſtay'd till they recover'd themſelves a little, and treated with them in a fitter Seaſon, in the Cool of the Day, *Gen.* III. 8.

And

And thus ought we to obſerve the commodious Opportunity of Reproof, when the Sinner is at Leiſure for Advice, in good Temper to be wrought upon, and in a proper Place, where our Counſel will be leaſt unwelcome, and our Deſign meet with feweſt Obſtructions. *A Word* thus *fitly ſpoken*, (to borrow a Similitude from Wiſdom it ſelf) *is like Apples of God in Pictures of Silver*, Prov. XXV. 11. When we have learn'd the right Seaſon of Reproof, and prudently diſtinguiſh'd betwixt *the Time to keep Silence, and the Time to ſpeak*, Eccleſ. III. 7. then every Word will (with the Bleſſing of God) have its due Force, and every Advice be piercing and ſucceſsful. *As an Ear-ring of Gold, and an Ornament of fine Gold, ſo is a wiſe Reprover upon an obedient Ear*, Prov. XXV. 12.

2. Let the Occaſion of our Reproof be ſome real Fault. A Stranger, that obſerves how warm and rigid we are about the external and remote Parts of Worſhip; how ſharp in our Cenſures on behalf of Ceremonies and indifferent things; how careful and zealous we are to maintain the *Out-Works* of Religion, will be tempted to imagine

that our Concern proportionably advances with the Dignity and Value of the Subject, and that we were abundantly more watchful to ſecure the *Eſſentials* and *Vitals* of it: But alas! here uſually we are more reſerv'd and ſparing, and thro' ſhameful Neglect loſe Ground in *Righteouſneſs*, *Mercy* and *Faith*, while we are exceedingly nice and curious about the *Mint*, *Anniſe* and *Cummin*. Now tho' the very Filings of Gold are precious, and nothing is ſo mean or ſuperfluous about Religion, but ought to have its due Tendance and Reſpect; yet there principally we are to double our Guard, where the Loſs will be capital; not ſo warmly to interpoſe in things diſputable as in things neceſſary, or quarrel with an Infirmity in Judgment as ſeverely as with a criminal Practice: An Error ſo common and miſchievous, that St. *Paul* thought fit to write a whole Chapter directly againſt it, *Rom.* XIV. That Reprover gives a ſhrewd Occaſion to ſuſpect the Honeſty and Piety of his Deſign, that muſt firſt prove the Action unlawful, before he can reprove it as ſinful: If the firſt Step be Diſpute, his Office is not that of a Rebuker,

buker, but of a Teacher. A real Guilt muſt be the Foundation, or all the Superſtructure of Reproof is vain. Thus fooliſhly *Job*'s Friends, inſtead of Comfort and Condolence, loaded him with cenſorious Imputations, and without Reaſon or Charity argu'd the Greatneſs of his Sin by the Greatneſs of his Suffering. But the worſt is, when we reprove another for what is really his Duty, and not rightly underſtanding the Caſe, run our ſelves into the Guilt of an Offence, while we raſhly rebuke what is not ſo. Thus pious *Hannah* ſuffered by the Reproof of *Eli*, when he miſtook her Earneſtneſs and Devotion in Prayer for the Effect of Drunkenneſs, 1 *Sam.* 1. 13. And thus many times, not only lawful, but laudable Actions will not ſtand the Teſt of a melancholick and hypocondriacal Humour; and too often what is pretended Strictneſs of Duty, is only the Scum of a ſuperſtitious Fancy.

Pity it is, that ſo uſeful a Weapon as *Reproof* ſhould be drawn againſt any thing but *Sin*; or that our Anger ſhould appear in any Cauſe, but that of vindicating the Honour of God, or recover-

ing

ing a Soul in imminent Danger of Deſtruction. But,

3. To make this Remedy ſucceſsful, 'tis fit that the Reprover be himſelf clear of the Fault he is to reprehend.

It is the Revenge, ſhall I ſay, or the Frailty of Man, to retort the Blow upon him that ſtrikes, and retalliate one Rebuke with another. *Phyſician heal thy ſelf*, is (eſteem'd at leaſt) every guilty Man's ſafe Retreat and Security: As if it were enough to cure us of the Plague, to diſcover the Tokens upon our Searcher. Now tho' another Man's Miſcarriage will never excuſe mine; yet ſince it galls our Natures to have our Faults and Follies cenſur'd, we are too often glad to get off the cheapeſt way, by bidding the Rebuker look at home, and if he is ſo expert at Amendment, to begin with himſelf. Since therefore Guilt is an invincible Prejudice and Obſtruction to Succeſs, whoſoever perſuades to Virtue ſhould himſelf lead the way; and he that caſts a Stone at any Sin, ſhould, as far as is poſſible in the Courſe of humane Life, be innocent, *Jo.* VIII. 7. For with what Face can he reprehend Sin in another, that indulges it in himſelf? Or, in

our

our Saviour's Words, *How will he ſee to caſt the Mote out of his Brother's Eye, that has a Beam in his own own?* Mat. VII. 3. That Man goes rather to expoſe himſelf, than amend his Brother, who is notoriouſly guilty of that Vice he would correct in him. If we would in ſome Meaſure be inſtrumental here, we muſt in a great Meaſure be innocent. Above all, it moſt nearly concerns us Miniſters, whoſe more particular Office it is to reprove and diſcourage Vice and Wickedneſs, to *take the* greateſt *heed to our Ways*, and guard our Innocence with all poſſible Care; to be circumſpect and *blameleſs in our Converſation*, that we may be free and open in our Rebuke. Otherwiſe the Apoſtle has ſupplied our Auditors with a Reply that may ſhame and confound us, *Rom.* II. 21, 22. *Thou that teacheſt another, teacheſt thou not thy ſelf? Thou that preacheſt a Man ſhould not ſteal, doſt thou ſteal? Thou that ſay'ſt a Man ſhould not commit Adultery, doſt thou commit Adultery? Thou that abhorreſt Idols, doſt thou commit Sacrilege?* How can he be urgent to have others believe that which himſelf does not; but by ſuffering his Life to run counter to his Doctrine,

ctrine, gives his Hearers to underſtand, that himſelf is an Infidel to his own Perſwaſives. However, a diſagreeable and hypocritical Life ought not to invalidate good Counſel: Advice, if good and wholeſome, ought to perſwade me, tho' it does not convince him that gives it; and if the Phyſician refuſe to take his own Preſcriptions, it ſhould not prejudice the Patient againſt them. If it be ſound and pious Doctrine, tho' taught by *Scribes and Phariſees*, we are bound to receive and embrace it: *Whatſoever they bid you obſerve*, ſays our Saviour, *Mat.* XXIII. 3. *that obſerve and do, but do not ye after their Works, for they ſay and do not.* But becauſe it is not eaſie to convince the World of this, (for Men are always glad of Pretences to ſhift off their Duty) it is highly to be wiſh'd, for the better Grace of a Reproof, that thoſe who attempt to correct Vice, be Men of Integrity and Virtue, and that they which blame others be blameleſs themſelves.

4. Reproof ought to be ſo manag'd, as to be void of any Suſpicion of Self-Intereſt, or Ill-Nature. It is to be us'd as a Motive to our Neighbour's Amend-

Amendment, not as a Step to our own Advantage, or an Opportunity to vent our Spleen. The Caution therefore juſt preceding the Command of this Duty in the XIX of *Levit.* and 17 *Verſe*, ſeems not unapplicable to our preſent Purpoſe: *Thou ſhalt not go up and down as a Tale-Bearer among thy People.* Which may inſtruct us, that ſuch a one is not fitly qualified for a Rebuker, that becomes ſo, out of a Deſire to furniſh another Converſation at his Neighbour's Expence, to gratifie his Pride, or ſhow his Authority, or ſatisfie his Revenge. Theſe are hoſtile and unworthy Actions; Reproof muſt proceed from a nobler Principle, and be the Effect of Love. It is not to publiſh and proclaim our Neighbour's Faults, not to upbraid his Indiſcretion, not to leſſen his Reputation, and make his Miſcarriages the ſcandalous Subject of the Town; this indeed is the Office of a *Tale Bearer*, who builds his own Credit upon the Ruin of his Friend, but is far from being any Part of Chriſtian Rebuke: That takes its Meaſures from Love, and makes our Neighbour's Benefit the End and Deſign of what we do, even to prevent his Sin, and to *provoke unto*

Love

Love and to good Works, Heb. X. 24. Here our Frowns and Diſlikes are amicable, our Wounds are friendly, and our Stripes healing: And ſo long as our Brother's Advantage is the Centre of our Actions, Malice it ſelf cannot faſten a Calumny upon them; for if the Application be ſharp and afflictive, the *Diſeaſe* is culpable, not the *Remedy*. And in order to clear our ſelves of the Suſpicion of any baſe and ſelfiſh Intention, Privacy in our Reproof is very adviſable: He that in our Prayer would have us *ſhut the Door*, in our Faſting *anoint the Head*, and *in our Alms not let the left Hand know what the Right Hand doth*, has in this Duty alſo enjoined us Tenderneſs and Secrecy; and would have us as cautious in publiſhing our Brother's Vices, as our own Virtues; *Go*, ſays he, *and tell him his Fault between him and thee alone*, Mat. XVIII. 15. Hereby we ſhall cut off all Pretence of any ſiniſter Deſign, and make the faireſt Appeal to his own Reaſon and Conſcience, that we aim at nothing herein but his Amendment and Welfare, when we make none privy to our Reproof but God and himſelf. But eſpecially, if withal,

5. Our

5. Our Rebukes be (as they ſhould be) free from Paſſion; if a Perſon in the Height of Anger be indiſpos'd to receive, certainly one under that Diſadvantage is incapable and unfit to give them, as being apt to turn *Reproof* into *Reproach*, *Ill-Language*, and *Reviling*: This is rather *Inſolence* than *Friendſhip*, and is ſo far from having any Tendency towards the Reformation of our Neighbour, that it only provokes and raiſes his Paſſions, and hardens him in his Obſtinacy, converts the medicinal Nature of Reproof into a Poyſon that inflames the Blood, and diſpatches the Patient inſtead of the Diſtemper. That which recovers an Offender muſt not be an Affront to his Perſon, but an Appeal to his Reaſon; it muſt appear under the obliging Air of *Kindneſs*, it muſt be uſhered in with *Meekneſs* and *good Will*. *Brethren*, ſays the Apoſtle, *if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, ye which are ſpiritual, reſtore ſuch a one in the Spirit of Meekneſs*, Gal. VI. 1. And his Advice to *Timothy* is this, *The Servant of the Lord muſt not ſtrive, but be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient, in Meekneſs inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves*, 2 Tim. II. 24, 25. An inſulting

ing and imperious Carriage, rough Words, and a ſevere Countenance, are in effect the Meſſengers of a *Challenge*; they ſeem to demand Satisfaction, and put the Defendant immediately upon his Guard; thus both Parties are exaſperated, and inſtead of *one* being *amended*, *Two* are made *worſe*. Advice therefore and Reproof are moſt likely to be ſucceſsful, where there is leaſt Appearance of Anger, and higheſt Symptoms of Affection. *Let the Righteous thus ſmite me, and it ſhall be a Kindneſs: let him reprove me, and it ſhall be an excellent Oyl which ſhall not break my Head*, Pſal. CXLI. 5.

Obſtinacy it ſelf has been won by Mildneſs, and when rougher Uſage has prov'd inſignificant, ſometimes *a ſoft Tongue has broke the Bone*, Prov. XXV. 15. But I confeſs there may be a Time when theſe gentle Means may not be ſufficient, and the Caſe of our Neighbour may require a ſeverer way of dealing. Wherefore,

6. In the laſt Place. Tho' our Reproof muſt not be violent and paſſionate, yet ought it ſometimes to be *vehement* and *earneſt*. *Non morbo parcendum, ſed ægro*, is the Phyſician's Rule; to

to go fearfully and too tenderly to work is to compliment the Diſeaſe, as if we were afraid of a Cure. *Nay, my Sons, it is no good Report that I hear*, was a ridiculous way of reproving thoſe Sons of *Eli* that were become Sons of *Belial*: Such Firebrands ought to have been *pluck'd out of the Fire*, with a Zeal proportion'd to their Enormities; for the Event ſhews that this too mild and eaſie Treatment rather encouraged them in their Abominations. When Vice grows rampant and unruly, when the Crime is a very great and publick Scandal to Religion, when it is become habitual, when it is committed without Reſerve, defended without Shame, and has ſtood it out againſt milder Uſage; then Severity is neceſſary, and perhaps in publick Company too. When *Peter* was an Offence to our *Saviour*, he called him Satan, *Mat.* XVI. 23. And when he was an Offence to the Church, St. *Paul* withſtood him to the Face, *Gal.* II. 11. And as this Apoſtle always uſed great Freedom in rebuking, ſo in ſome Caſes he recommends it as the propereſt Method. Thus when the *Cretians* were grown falſe, beaſtly, and luxurious, he thus writes to

Titus

Titus their Biſhop: *Rebuke them ſharply, that they may be ſound in the Faith*, Tit. I. 13. But I have hinted before how peculiarly concern'd in this Duty thoſe are that are ſtiled Overſeers of the Flock. What I intend here more chiefly reſpects *Common Converſation*, where diſcreet and ſharp Reproof may outface the Saucineſs of Impiety; where evil Communications may be corrected and amended; where Virtue may be made as influential as Vice is infectious; and where by prudent Advice and Correction, a *wholeſome Tongue may become a Tree of Life*, as the wiſe Man ſays, *Prov.* XV. 4. Rebuke here, if cloſe and timely, has a double Edge; it ſtops the Profligate in his full Career, and brings him to Conſideration; it convinces him that wiſer Men entirely diſapprove his Conduct, that he acts as much againſt right Reaſon, as againſt his true Intereſts; that he affronts the ſober Part of Mankind by his Behaviour, and therefore with *Iſhmael*, *muſt always expect their Hands to be againſt him*; thus *as Iron ſharpens Iron, ſo may the Countenance of a Man his Friend*, Prov. XXVII. 17. *Have Salt in your ſelves*, ſaid our bleſſed Saviour, who has

has alſo commanded us to *let our Light ſhine before others*; giving us hereby to underſtand, that a Chriſtian's Deportment is not to terminate in a Care of his own Soul, but muſt have a ſavoury Influence upon all with whom he converſes: He muſt not (as too many do) content himſelf with the Soundneſs of his own Principles, and the Regularity of his own Practice; but as his bleſſed Lord, he muſt *go about doing Good*, Acts X. 38. And oh! how many ſeaſonable Opportunities and Advantages to a ſerious and well-diſpoſed Chriſtian would every Day afford to be helpful and beneficial to Souls, where there are ſo many Ignorant to inſtruct; ſo many Weak to ſupport; ſo many Unſettled to adviſe, and ſo many Offenders to rebuke!

It is, I confeſs, an unpopular and unpractiſed Duty, which I have been recommending, though it be really ſuch as the Command of God and the Caſe of our Neighbour requires of us: For while the rich Man thinks it below him, and the poor Man pretends it is above him; while the Ignorant plead their Ignorance in Excuſe, and the Learned ſtudy Arguments to avoid it; nay, while

while pious, and ſober, and well-diſpoſed Chriſtians can ſcarce be prevailed upon to regard and practiſe it, it comes to paſs that the Rebuker can find no Place in the Earth, and the *faithful* Reprover *is ceaſed from among the Children of Men.* Wherefore to preſs this Duty, and conclude this Diſcourſe. If we are concern'd, in earneſt concern'd to keep down the Growth, and weaken the Intereſt of Sin in the World; if we have any Regard for Souls, and are deſirous to promote and forward their Salvation; if we have any Love of God and Senſe of Goodneſs; theſe all perſuade, command, and bind this Duty upon us. And would to God we were all ſo far convinc'd, as faithfully to make the Experiment, and try how proper and uſeful an Expedient for all theſe glorious Purpoſes, a ſerious, ſeaſonable, friendly and perſuaſive Reproof is, and what an excellent Method we take to reclaim and amend the World, when we rebuke our Friend, and *ſuffer not Sin upon him.*

I end all with that pertinent and preſſing Advice of the Apoſtle, *Heb.* III. 13. *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to Day, leaſt any of you be hardened thro' the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.*

FINIS.

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